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SUBJECT: Strong Sata Support in Northern Province

1. Summary. Conversations with local residents and party reps suggest that the Patriotic Front (PF) party is set for a strong showing in Northern Province. Low voter turnout, however, could limit the party's support, as even local party reps do not expect more than 50 percent of eligible voters to vote. Campaigning has been peaceful, but there have been some anecdotal incidents of voter card buying, disrupted rallies, and distribution of money and gifts by the ruling party. The region's relative under-development appears to be the key spur for PF candidate Michael Sata. End Summary.

PF Confident of Victory

2. On October 28, Emboffs met with Jim Sinyinza, PF provincial chair, and Jonas Kalela, PF provincial secretary, in Mpika, the home of PF candidate Michael Sata. Sinyinza expressed confidence that PF would win Mpika and Northern Province and fare even better than in 2006, when Sata gleaned 42 percent of the province's vote. He said the PF's victory in a recent Parliamentary by-election in an area outside Mpika was a good indication of the party's solid footing in the region. Sinyinza also considered the participation at PF's well-attended rallies to be a telling measurement of PF's growing popularity.

3. Sinyinza said campaigning had been peaceful on all sides, and that the police have been even-handed. He did say, however, that representatives of the ruling Movement for Multiparty Democracy had been arrested on October 27 for buying voter cards - which are essential for voting on October 30 - at K50,000 (or approximately USD 12) each. He added that the MMD, particularly in advance of the Kanchibiya by-election, had been offering money, food, and clothing in exchange for political support. He showed emboffs a copy of a check - one of many, he said - for Kwacha one million (approximately USD 215) from an alleged MMD rep to a community school, in order to curry favor. Sinyinza said that PF had advised its supporters to accept the money, but to vote for PF.

4. Sinyinza expressed concern about voter turnout, which he said would be lower due to deaths, relocation, and the loss of national registration cards, which are essential for voting. He thought that the Zambian Government had restricted NRC renewals/issuances from areas that are opposition strongholds.

UPND Claims Second Place

5. Emboffs also spoke with United Party for National Development (UPND) Mpika regional campaign manager Eli Musukwa, who further corroborated PF's claims of strength in the province. Musukwa said PF almost certainly would win in Mpika district and Northern Province as a whole. He believed, however, that UPND could come in second, taking up to 30 percent of the vote - a claim that seems quite unrealistic given Hichilema's performance in 2006. Chances of victory, however, were hindered by UPND leadership's refusal to commit needed funds to the provincial campaign. Hichilema has made just one campaign visit to Northern province, in September, and no other senior leaders have come to campaign. Similarly, he said UPND would not be able to deploy polling agents to all polling places due to limited resources devoted to the physically vast province. Nonetheless, Musukwa said he was confident UPND would beat MMD in the province-despite the ruling party's financial enticements-because people were "fed up" with the party's inaction while in government.

6. Musukwa thought voter turnout would be low, citing similar

reasons as his PF counterpart - youth disenfranchisement, people having moved or died. While he noted all parties suffered from the low turnout, the MMD's party machinery would put it at a slight advantage. He spoke favorably of the ECZ's running of the poll, as well as the conduct of the campaign, which - despite some incidents of PF youth disrupting UPND rallies in the province - has been largely peaceful.

RURAL RESIDENTS BULLISH ON PF

¶7. Emboffs spoke with several rural residents in a small village 70 km south of Mpika, who confirmed many of the sentiments expressed by the opposition party representatives, noting particular dissatisfaction with MMD leadership and its choice of Banda as its candidate. They expressed distrust of all politicians, including Hichilema, as his motives for entering politics seemed unclear to them. They considered Hichilema's business background as a negative and associated it with former president Chiluba's corrupt and inefficient management of privatization in the 1990s. Some of this resentment also seemed to stem from a perception that southern regions of Zambia had benefited disproportionately from development assistance.

¶8. Villagers acknowledged past practices of gift-giving in 2006, but they said only MMD had given some clothing in 2008. They said local traditional leaders have little or no influence any longer on how rural citizens vote [Note: PF leaders also made this claim, adding that Western Province is a notable exception. End note.] They predicted Sata would win three-quarters of the Mpika area vote. They complained about the region's lack of development under MMD, and even claimed that they had been told by MMD campaigners that the region was being punished for withholding support from the ruling party in the 2006 election. As for Sata, they described him as a "man of action" capable of implementing change. As an example, they cited Sata's tarring of the roads in Mpika shortly after being elected as an Mpika MP in the 1990s. They thought MMD Secretary General Katele Kalumba would have been a formidable foe for Sata in Northern and Luapula provinces. They also expected generally low voter turnout based on apathy and overall disdain for self-serving politicians. "Why should we put money in their pockets?" one noted.

Comment

¶9. This broad range of perspectives suggests there is a good deal of truth to underpin Sata's claims of support in the north. Furthermore, Emboffs were struck by the significant amount of PF campaign materials encountered as they worked their way northward, as well as the multitudes of PF supporters who would flash the party's closed fist symbol as they were passed on the road. A victory here could prove key in a close race, particularly given Sata's relatively good performance here in 2006. The MMD's Mpika campaign manager's refusal to meet with Emboffs also indicates a degree of insecurity about the party's chances there on October 30. However, voter turnout, if low, could negate Sata's momentum, as the MMD's party machinery and resources could be sufficient to hold off a PF challenge. End comment.

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